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DER SEE AND DIE SEE.

AS shown in the various dictionaries, the distinction in the meaning of this word according as it is masculine or feminine is comparatively recent. It arose in the literary language, and is not yet generally true of the language of the people. The matter presents a very interesting phase of linguistic life.

The word was originally masculine, and designated a large body of water, whether an inland lake or the sea. The feminine gender arose in the North, and is also found, by the side of the masculine, in Old English. On the continent it prevailed in Holland and in that part of North Germany that adjoined the sea. This portion of Germany was, however, small in comparison with what remained true to the masculine gender. Under ordinary circumstances, there can be no doubt that, on the rise of the literary language, the masculine would have prevailed, and the use of the feminine be regarded as provincial. And just this thing did happen where the two genders met on an equal footing, that is, in the sense of 'lake.' With reference to the other meaning of the word, namely that of 'sea,' the North German had the advantage in spite of his being in the minority. He lived on the shores of the sea, and it made up a large part of his life; he had a hundred occasions to mention it in general literature where the writer in the inland had but one, and it was he who wrote almost the whole of the technical literature of the subject. Thus it came about that when Germans, no matter where they lived, read of the sea, in almost every case it was what a native of the northern coast had written. Hence all Germans that read became familiar with the use of 'See' as a feminine when it referred to the sea, though they continued to designate a familiar

inland body of water as 'der See.' Later, the grammarian formulated the distinction, and the school-teacher began to teach it to those whose speech would otherwise have maintained the local usage—whether masculine or feminine—in both senses of the word. That even literary usage did not at once become crystallized along the line of gender, is but natural: hence we find some Southerners continuing to use the masculine when writing of the sea, and some Northerners employing the feminine when speaking of a lake; indeed, now and then, a Northerner, willing to yield his natural usage in the case of an inland body of water, has counted even the Mediterranean as a 'Binnensee' and called it 'der Südsee.'

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